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GENERAL WALTERS TESTIFIES

TOM BROKAW: In the Watergate coverup trial today the role of the Central Intelligence Agency became an issue again.

And here's a report on that from Carl Stern in Washington.

CARL STERN: General Vernon Walters of the Central Intelligence Agency was the witness today as lawyers for H.R. Haldeman unveiled their legal strategy. The so-called CIA defense rejected by Judge Sirica in the first Watergate trial.

Under questioning by Haldeman's attorney Frank Strictler Walters testified he saw nothing improper with the White House orders six days after Watergate to try to stop the FBI investigation. Walters said though he knew of no CIA operations that might be jeopardized, he was willing to tell the FBI that danger existed because he felt Haldeman might know something he didn't. Strictler then said he would prove ultimately that White House concern about the CIA was genuine. That sent fur flying. Prosecutor James Neale angrily protested that defense had been exploded long ago. Neale asked Walters if he had been aware of Haldeman's conversations with President Nixon about the political need to block the investigation.

NEALE: You didn't that Haldeman a man in that high position would be fooling around, did you?

WALTERS: I just couldn't conceive in such a thing.

Judge Sirica then insisted on rehearing the tape in which the President agreed the CIA should be used. Haldeman Attorney John Wilson objected heatedly to the whole procedure. But in the end Judge Sirica indicated the matter should be left for the jury.

Well, apparently in a few weeks the jury will get to hear Haldeman and his defense of what was done, including the CIA defense.

Carl Stern, NBC News, Washington.